Pass to the Fascinating World of Thailand: Muay Thai Experiences
The term “Muay Thai” conveys a wealth of meaning to its devotees around the world. One of the most ancient of all martial arts, it is a workout that toughens the limbs and hones the mind. …a discipline that pushes both body and soul to their limits and beyond …a way of life grounded on ethics and respect …a rich tradition brimming with beauty and grace …a key to the quest for self-knowledge …the martial art of kings and the king of martial arts.
Muay Thai: The Martial Art of Kings

Muay Thai is, perhaps, unique in being a royal martial art. Originating as a strategic warfare technique, in centuries past four muay fighters, their fists bound in hemp cord for additional strength, were assigned on the battlefield to protect the legs of each royal elephant—the war machines of their day. Expertise in muay gradually became the means of personal advancement for such fighters, with skilled practitioners invited to live in the palace; teach the young princes; and even display their techniques in front of the king. At some point during the Ayuthaya period (1350 – 1767), an elite guard of exceptional muay fighters was formed, giving birth to Muay Luang or Royal Muay.

A king of Ayutthaya, known as “The Tiger King”, was highly-skilled in muay. A legend relates how in 1702 the young king, hearing that there was to be a muay contest at a nearby temple fair, disguised himself as a peasant in order to take part incognito. Needless to say the king won all of his bouts that day!

Nai Khanom Tom: A Muay Thai Hero

If anyone can claim to be the authentic Muay Thai hero, it is surely Nai Khanom Tom. Taken prisoner by the Burmese when they ransacked the capital city of Ayutthaya in 1767, some years later he was selected to take part in an event staged before the king in Rangoon to compare the comparative strengths of muay Siam and muay Burma. Nai Khanom Tom was victorious and even King Mangra was impressed by his fighting skills, being reputed to have declared, “Every part of this man is blessed with venom. Even empty-handed he could defeat nine or ten opponents!” Nai Khanom Tom is commemorated by a statue in Ayutthaya’s Provincial Sports Ground with sparring Muay Thai fighters depicted around the pedestal.
Like any other martial art, anyone wishing to become proficient in Muay Thai must start with the basics: the ready-for-action stance; the distinctive Yang Sam Khum or Muay Thai Shuffle; and methods of deploying the art’s distinctive arsenal of weapons-fist, elbow, knee and foot-in five attacking techniques-punch, elbow-strike, knee-kick, kick and foot-thrust. It is only when these basics have been mastered that fighters can move on to the exciting-and difficult!-range of mae mai Muay Thai or advanced techniques, the names of which are thrilling in themselves: the Crocodile Swings its Tail, Break the Elephant’s Neck and Giant Catches the Monkey. Beginners and experts alike, however, must understand and participate in the rich legacy of rites and customs which are closely intertwined with the art of Muay Thai.
**Forward Muay Shuffle (Yang Sam Khum Ruk)**

1. **Start**
   - Pull your rear foot up to your lead foot.

2. **Step forwards with your lead foot**

3. **Raise your rear foot, bending the knee**

4. **Keeping your knee raised, extend your leg outwards**

5. **Put your foot down in front**

6. **Pull your rear foot up to your lead foot**

The positions of your feet have now been reversed and you are ready to repeat the sequence as shown.

1. **Pull your rear foot up to your lead foot**

2. **Step forwards with your lead foot**

3. **Raise your rear foot, bending the knee**

4. **Keeping your knee raised, extend your leg outwards**

5. **Put your foot down in front**

6. **Finish**
One of the most important Muay Thai traditions is *Wai Khru* or Paying Respect to Teachers. In order to become a fully-fledged Muay Thai fighter, a person has to pass through a series of ceremonies or “rites of passage”, all of which come under the generic heading of *Wai Khru*:

- **Khuen Khru** or **Yok Khru** is the initiation ceremony in which a teacher accepts a would-be-fighter as his student who in return vows to uphold the ethics of the art.

- **Wai Khru Pracham Pi** is the annual ritual which allows fighters to pay respect not only to their present teachers but also to the souls of those who have long since passed away.

- **Wai Khru Ram Muay** or the Ritual Dance of Homage is performed at the conclusion of the *Wai Khru Pracham Pi* and before the commencement of every bout.

- **Khrop Khru** is the final step, reserved for the few fighters who become teachers in their own right and thus entitled to pass on the rich Muay Thai legacy to their own students.
Of all the forms of Wai Khru, Wai Khru Ram Muay is by far the most celebrated. A graceful and aesthetic ritual which has no specific religious connotations, its origins are lost in the mists of time. However, it is believed to have evolved as a stylized peace-time form of training in the days when muay was a military art. Over time the Wai Khru Ram Muay developed to serve several functions:

• It enabled the fighter to pay respect to his teacher and propitiate the spirits.

• It mentally and physically prepared him for the forthcoming contest.

• It gave the fighter a chance to assess his opponent’s physical state and pinpoint any possible weaknesses.

• It demoralized the opponent if expertly performed.

• In the days when contests were held outdoors and on the bare earth it allowed the fighter to assess the ground conditions and the direction of the sun.

Many of these points still hold true today.
Muay Thai is practised all over the world, with the rules varying somewhat from country to country and according to the presiding organization. Basically, a bout consists of a maximum of 5 rounds of 3 minutes, with a 2-minute break between each round.

The complete set of 24 Muay Thai Rules cover all aspects of professional fights, including the minimum age (15); the referee; judges and chairman. Points are awarded for hard and accurate strikes with the muay arsenal; for appropriate Muay Thai style; for dominant muay skills; and for the deployment of traditional defence and counter-attack techniques. The three judges, each sitting on a different side of the ring, are not permitted to confer and complete score sheets for each round. The referee collects these either at the end of the bout or at the end of each round for a championship fight. The score sheets are passed on to the Chairman, who verifies and authenticates them before announcing the result.
Outfit of a Professional Muay Thai Fighter

In accordance with the Muay Thai regulations the following items must be worn during a professional bout: red or blue shorts; gloves certified by the World Muay Thai Council and in accordance with the weight division, worn over fists bound in 5 cm x 6 m of soft tape; a groin protector tied only at the back; a mouth guard; and the mongkhon (head circlet) during the performance of the Wai Kru Ram Muay. Permitted optional items are amulets (only on the arms-prajied—or waist and covered by material to avoid injury); and single elastic bandages on the arms, legs or ankles. Shin guards, metallic decorations and the application of Vaseline or similar substances prior to a bout are all forbidden, as are long hair, beards and a moustache which extends over the lips.
Muay Thai for Kids

Muay Thai training can have distinct benefits for children of all ages and both sexes. It teaches them how to defend themselves against a real-life physical attack; builds their confidence and discipline; strengthens their physical health and responses; trains their mental alertness and control; and, through the wai khru traditions instills ethical principles and respect. Muay Thai can therefore be regarded as good all-round training for the youngsters of today.

Muay Thai and Kickboxing

The most common misconception concerning Muay Thai is that it is one and the same as kickboxing whereas in fact that is very much a newcomer compared to Muay Thai which stretches back for at least a millennium… In the late 1950s Osamu Noguchi, a boxing entrepreneur, visited Thailand to observe Muay Thai. In the following years he devised the concept of kickboxing, fusing Muay Thai’s kicking techniques with aspects of karate and boxing. When he introduced this sport to Europe, the confusion between Muay Thai and kickboxing started. Among the essential differences between the two is the stance, which in kickboxing favours punches, while its punch-kick combos derive from karate. The scoring system for the two martial arts is also different.
Where to Watch Muay Thai

No trip to Thailand for Muay Thai aficionados would be complete without a pilgrimage to one or both of Bangkok’s two main stadiums where they can spend every night of the week watching bouts. Weekend fights are usually lower level, so aim for a weekday, with the highlight being the bouts taking place at around 21:00.

The Rajadamnern Stadium, the older and, with its air-conditioning, arguably the more comfortable of the two, was founded in 1945 and marked the final step in the transformation of muay from a traditional martial art to a commercial venture. Situated in the city’s government district on so-called Champs Elysée of Thailand, the rules and regulations of modern Muay Thai were formulated here.

Open: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday (18:30)
Tel: +66 2281 4205, +66 2280 1084
Website: www.rajadamnern.com
www.facebook.com/rajadamnern
For taxi: เวทีมวยราชดำาเนิน
The less glamorous—only electric fans!—but perhaps even more renowned Lumpinee Stadium opened in 1956 and is run by the military on behalf of the Thai government. The fights staged here are regarded by some as being of a higher quality and it is one of the few places in Thailand where betting is legal. In February 2014, the stadium has been moved to its new location on Ram Inthra Road, which can approximately hold up to 8,000 audiences.

Open: Tuesday & Friday (18:30); Saturday (16:00)

Tel: +66 2251 4303, +66 2522 6843 and +66 2282 3141
Website: www.muaythailumpinee.net
For taxi: เวทีมวย¨»ม¡ินี

Admission charges for both stadiums are in the general range 1,000 to 2,000 baht, depending on the fight lineup and the location of the seat, with ringside being recommended for enhanced excitement and adrenaline!
Camps

Muay Thai camps are to be found everywhere in Thailand and can tailor training programmes from one day to several months. Many such camps cater specifically to overseas visitors and provide accommodation together with English-speaking instructors. Broadly speaking, the camps can be divided into five categories:

**Muay Thai in Luxury**
The luxurious Fairtex Sports and Racquet Club in the resort of Pattaya (www.fairtexpattaya.com) features over 60 different sports, including Muay Thai, complete with Olympic pool and also provides fitness facilities for kids.

**Muay Thai for Champions**
For those intent on fighting for real in the ring, two “no frills” camps with a very Thai atmosphere and tiptop khru that are worth checking out are Jitti Gym (www.facebook.com/jittigym.jitti) and Kaewsamrit Gym (www.kaewsamritgym.com), both in Bangkok.

**Muay Thai for Fitness**
Two major Bangkok facilities cater for those interested in Muay Thai for fitness…and at very low prices. The National Sports Stadium’s Martial Arts Center is affiliated to the Department of Physical Education (www.dpe.go.th)

**Muay Thai for Traditionalists**
Those wishing to train in muay as a pure martial art can go to camps specializing in the various forms of Muay Boran (Ancient Muay). Khru Lek (Baan Chang Thai: www.samkhum.com) and Khru Praeng (Muay Chaiya Siam Yuth Center: www.muaychaiya.com) teach Muay Chaiya in Bangkok, while Muay Korat is taught by Khru Amnaj in Bangkok (www.facebook.com/muaykorat)

**Muay Thai for Beach Bums**
Inexpensive beachside Muay Thai camps proliferate along Thailand’s tropical shores, catering for those who want a “sea and sun” vacation with a difference. The world-famous resort islands of Phuket and Samui are popular destinations: check out www.muaythai-camp-thailand.com www.tigermuaythai.com www.wmcmuaythai.org

Disclaimer: the inclusion of a camp in this publication does not constitute a recommendation by the Tourism Authority of Thailand, which accepts no responsibility in association with such listings.
Muay Thai Souvenirs

Muay Thai devotees will not want to leave Thailand without buying souvenirs...and there is a wide choice available! Apart from authentic Muay Thai gear and accessories, T-shirts, figurines and publications/DVDs are on sale everywhere. But perhaps the best souvenir is something no money can buy: the special feeling of being in the birthplace of Muay Thai...the Martial Art of Kings and the King of Martial Arts.

World Wai Khru Muay Thai Ceremony

17 March each year

For the Muay Thai training, the first thing for all boxers to do is to perform the “Wai Khru” or respect paying ceremony which has long been observed until this day. The Wai Khru ceremony is to show the boxers’ regard and gratitude for their parents, the sacred objects, and the masters who have taught them, which brings auspiciousness to the boxers and makes their minds calm and mindful.

As for Muay Thai dance, it is to convey the specific characteristics of a Muay Thai master or camp. Muay Thai boxers who perform the same style of Wai Khru and Muay Thai dance will usually not fight each other since they understand that they have the same master.

The ancient capital of Ayutthaya is home to the annual World Wai Khru Muay Thai Ceremony and Miracle Muay Thai Festival. Each year, Muay Thai boxers from around the world participate in the event to pay respect to their teachers, pay homage to the legendary Muay Thai folk hero, Nai Khanom Tom, and show their appreciation for the beautiful art of Muay Thai at Ayutthaya World Heritage Site. There are also many activities such as:
- Muay Thai demonstrations
- Muay Thai tournaments with boxers contending for the W.P.M.F. belt
- Learning and enjoying the demonstrations of Thai arts, handicrafts, and culture, including the Traditional Thai Tattoo, making of swords, performing of Thai martial arts, and an exhibition of ancient weapons.

Muay Thai